LOUGH NEAGH JOURNEY

by L. Gowan

The SHOOTING TIMES

and Country Magazine

SEVENTY-FOURTH YEAR FRIDAY, AUGUST 24th, 1956 1s. 3d. WEEKLY

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Hunting and Shooting

A CORRESPONDENT in a hunting contemporary is concerned about the present-day relationship between hunting and shooting. It is not what it used to be, he complains and we summarise briefly the main points of his argument.

Syndicate shoots do not treat the fox with the same respect which he was accorded in the old days when estate owners considered it a disgrace if their coverts were drawn blank. The fox has to bear the brunt of the blame for damage done to game stocks while the stoats, weasels and badgers, which are less often seen abroad, are forgotten or neglected. Amongst ill-informed shooters it is now a matter for congratulation to harbour no foxes. Today although there are fewer foxes, nearly all shooting syndicates report that the annual head of game killed gets less and less. But a few years ago estates were better keepered and vermin was more reasonably controlled. Such an outlook and disregard of other sporting activities is either due to ignorance or selfishness.

There is some truth in what he says. There are, unfortunately, some syndicates which contain vulpicidal maniacs; they are relatively new to shooting, they know nothing of its background and to them a fox is the lowest and the largest form of vermin. Their keeper may know better, but he is the piper and his employers call the tune. That is why some hunting countries suffer from a dearth of foxes and why, quite rightly, the hunt blames syndicate shoots. If only all such men who blame the fox for their troubles were to divert some of their destructive energy against the vermin birds, especially in the nesting season, they might create a better balance of nature and mutual understanding.

In other respects our critic is somewhat off the mark. It is by no means correct to say that foxes are fewer today. An earlier study of the very newspaper in which he writes revealed in the widespread reports from many hunts that there is no general shortage of foxes; in fact litters have been up to and above average, in spite of myxomatosis, and returns of foxes killed by hounds have been high. If the annual head of game killed gets less, the reasons are most likely due to the unexplained decrease in the partridge population, intensive and chemical farming methods and the lack of widespread, efficient keepering.

It must be remembered, too, that there is another side to this story. Good keepering always meant good hunting. Many countries support too many foxes for good hunting or good shooting. The shooting man who has witnessed the sad story of destruction beside his flight pond or amongst his coverts is not prepared to suffer too many foxes, especially if he knows that much of his country is nowadays unhunted, or that hounds will change foxes so many times in a day that they go home without a kill.

There is room for improvement, co-operation and tolerance on both sides. As the writer of the letter we quote concludes, shooting and foxhunting have existed together since time immemorial. There is no reason why they should not continue to do so.

They are equal partners in the old established firm of field sports, and there is no room for quibbles about seniority of rank. Come to that, foxhunters might remember that were it not for the tolerance of shooting men there might be no hunting at all in many of those countries where they complain of a shortage of foxes.

THE SHOOTING TIMES
AND
COUNTRY MAGAZINE

Official Organ of
THE WILDFOWLERS' ASSOCIATION
OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

No. 3859 FRIDAY, AUGUST 24, 1956 Founded 1882

The wild life of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after.—King George VI.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Tasmanian Devils

The Tasmanian wolf, Thylacine or Tasmanian Devil, is not extinct, as was beginning to be feared by naturalists. This news, reaching us via the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, is based on reports from a number of reliable witnesses who have seen tracks of the animal in the densely wooded backlands of Tasmania.

Similar to the wolf in habits and food, the Thylacine is a carnivore striped in grey and dark brown, but, like other Australian mammals, is a marsupial, of which the best-known example is the kangaroo. The uniqueness of marsupials lies in the fact that the young complete their development in the outside ventral pocket of the female. The Thylacine is an unusually swift runner, a quality, however, that fails to protect it from the dingo, which is the destroyer of much of the native animal life of Australia.

The Animals and Birds Protection Board of Tasmania, from which the Union has received this information, intends to finance a scientific expedition to the natural haunts of the Thylacine. The expedition seeks scientific evidence on this animal and its environment which will serve to establish its factual position. The survival of the Thylacine is due to the Tasmanian Board's preservation policy.

Sea Fees

Sea fishing would seem to be an unassailable stronghold of free sport, but the news that two American states now issue licences for salt water fishing sounds as though even this is doomed. Most of us probably regret, from time to time, the passing of those prehistoric days when rivers were full of fish, woods full of game, and a hatchet provided a satisfactory settlement of political or sporting rights. How delightfully simple life must have been!

Now we raise fish artificially, plant them in rivers, take great pains to hook them out again, and often loose them once more—a chain of action which would have rendered us certifiable in the opinion of even our not-so-distant ancestors. Such are the effects of civilisation on the sportsman. But the harvest of the ocean has so far remained a free bounty of nature. Now that California and Alabama charge a fee for licences to fish in the sea, not even the mysteries of the deep are safe from the controls of bureaucracy.

Fire Damage

More heath and forest fires than usual occurred during the dry weather earlier in the year, and it is safe to say that most of them were caused, as always, by the carelessness of man. A few were the result of deliberate acts of destruction and still less were due to "natural causes."

In America the situation appears to be similar, although, of course, on a much larger scale, and many more fires are started deliberately. Last year about 92 per cent of all fires recorded in America—which destroyed over eight million acres — were caused by man, and the rest by lightning.

The number of forest fires by major causes in 1955 were attributed, in order, to arsonists, debris burners, smokers, campers, lumbermen, railroads, miscellaneous man-caused, and lightning. The U.S. Forest Service reports that people still deliberately set fires for their own reason, good or bad.

Killarney Lakes

The announcement that some 8,000 acres of the Kenmore Estate had been bought by an American, Mr. J. Stuart Robertson, was a relief to many people, among them members on both sides in the Dail—where the protection of the peoples' rights in Killarney have been frequently debated in recent months.

Fears had been expressed that the estate—which includes the Middle and Lower lakes—might be bought by some individual or combine who would, in the course of exploiting the area for gain, seriously alter its appearance and its status.

Mr. Robertson has bought the property for personal reasons. He intends to live there for part of each year and breed horses. At the same time (by his own inclination and by protective clauses in the lease) the public will enjoy the freedom of the area as they have always done.

I have seen no specific mention of fishing rights, but it is to be presumed that these will be unchanged. When I last heard of the matter salmon and trout fishing in the lakes was free to anyone holding the appropriate licence.

Gone to Lunch

"The nest is usually placed far away from the feeding grounds, and, in order that the young may obtain sustenance sufficient for their wants, the woodcock is compelled to carry its young to such place as shall afford it the necessary provender. What a labour it must be for the woodcock to transport its young, one by one, in its feet and claws some distance to the feeding grounds and back again we can have little idea; but the fact remains, and all we can do is to look on and wonder."—*Moorman in The Shooting Times, January 11, 1884.*

AUCEPS.

Duck flight seen from the top of a tall cliff, or redshank tracks in a mud-gutter?

Some August Jottings

by Tower-Bird

THIS last fortnight or so, we have enjoyed a good dish of mushrooms each morning for breakfast. The first ones I found came as something of a pleasant shock, for they were growing on sun-baked marsh pasture, and their appearance on a well-used aerodrome runway could not have surprised me more. Then came a day of downpour, with thunder and lightning lasting continually from mid-day to nearly dusk.

That evening, after a sultry, copperised sky had cleared and the last grumble of thunder had been heard in the far distance, the marshes looked like a witch's cauldron. Ragged banks of heavy swirling mist rose and became joined in one sullen grey blanket, obscuring all that lay under and behind it, until the following morning's sun quickly dispelled it in straggling, squirming wreaths, which finally vanished into thin air. Afterwards, certain marsh grazing was dotted white with fine fleshy mushrooms that to me seem to have a far better flavour than the crop which comes later when the blackberries are ripening along the hedgerows.

While the storm which raged all afternoon—swamping out our annual August Bank Holiday fete and several camps of boy scouts and girl guides laid out on exposed plateaux and hillsides—was at its height, I remembered suddenly one "length" of camouflaged netting lying in the cupboard under the stairs, which I had not got ready for the approaching season. Here was "just the job for the day." Opening the back-door, which looks out over miles of marsh to the distant downs, I hooked one end of the net to the corner of the open door, and the other on to the meat-safe hanging in the passage. Then I started on the tedious, but very well-worth-while job of tying down the strips of hessian, etc., to prevent them from fluttering in the wind. Some pieces I cut from the netting, re-tying them to fill gaps in the camouflage design.

Saving Valuable Time

I always carry at least one piece of camouflage netting in my capacious bag when out after pigeon or duck. If, however, I know that I am going to decoy pigeon in the open, or to set up my net on the saltings or in any exposed position under the flight line of duck—then I carry three (sometimes four) strong canes to which coloured tapes are firmly tied, and to which, when I set up the net, the netting in turn is tied. It can save an awful lot of time if you get all such minor jobs done, so that no time is wasted when you reach the actual shooting ground.

It took me nearly an hour to complete this particular little job to my satisfaction, and all the time I stood almost in the open doorway fork lightning was ripping the sky over marsh and downs, and at times so brilliant were the flashes that I was forced to shut my eyes before being able to carry on with the tying down (in two and even three places) of the streamers. Strips of material which flap in a breeze when you are behind the net in the open naturally catch the ever-alert eyes of pigeon and duck. First my wife and then a neighbour asked me what I was doing, and I replied: "The arts of the fowler are not yet dead, madam, as you have perhaps erroneously believed."

Two Cuckoo Duck

Later that night, I chanced to be reading a book when a sentence in it recalled a letter which appeared recently in this journal from the one and only Hugh Monahan concerning the discovery of what he called a "cuckoo duck" in America. The duck (I write from memory) was, I believe, the American red-head. At all events, in the book I was reading ("Infancy in Animals," by Maurice Burton, published by Hutchinson, and shortly to be reviewed in the S.T.) the author was discussing the parasitic habit which has been adopted by the cuckoo and the cow-bird of depositing their eggs in the nests of other birds. He goes on to say that the blackheaded duck of South America distributes its eggs in the nests of night-heron, ibises and coot. So apparently the red-head is not the only "cuckoo duck" in America.

Later on in the same book the author happened to mention the legend of how the young of the adder (the adder, of course, gives birth to its young instead of laying eggs) are supposed to take refuge in the face of danger down their mother's throat. And the idle thought came to me that many good naturalists have sworn to seeing this act (the old adder swallowing its young) in the past, and obviously quite honestly believed that they had seen it, for the human eye can easily be deceived.

Here, thought I, is a case which has something of a parallel, perhaps, with that of the woodcock carrying its young. Good naturalists and honest men say that they have seen the young adders vanishing down their mother's throat, and good naturalists and honest men have seen a woodcock carry her young. Here, then, is a good illustration of my argument about the woodcock. What would one of those "sound" naturalists and honest men who had "witnessed," with their own eyes, an adder swallow its young have said to me if I had doubted his word? He would quite naturally have considered that I was inferring that he was a prevaricator of the truth. Therefore, surely I am in my rights in saying that I would prefer to see for myself this most unusual feat of the woodcock before I herald it as a fact.

Again, on a somewhat lesser plane, there have been scores of men who have sworn not only to having seen a dog-fox cross, but actually witnessed the fulfilment of the marriage and the birth of the litter. In actual fact, and despite the "unshakable evidence" laid down in books and letters, such a cross still lacks confirmatory evidence acceptable to the biologist.

Back to our Muttons

But back to the land! . . . Although I do not particularly want to crow about it, I have said, ever since the foul myxomatosis swept through our countryside, that the rabbit would not be beaten, and today it is winning all hands up. I have received literally scores of letters from all parts of the country telling me how rabbits are returning. I, myself, know of a spot not very far from where I write, where you may peer round the corner of a low hedge any evening and watch many rabbits of different sizes playing about on the grass. Once a week a friend of mine shoots himself a couple from this colony. And I know of many more.

Personally, I have not heard of a single case of myxomatosis in England this year. Surely this must be far too good to be true. Can any reader damp my pleasure?

What will be the next move among "officials" as the rabbit increases? In my view (as it is the present official view) farmers will be made responsible for keeping rabbit stocks under control on their land, or be sent in a bill for intervention by authority, on their failing to do so. As I have been saying for years, any farmer could employ a rabbit-catcher, and a group, or syndicate of farmer-neighbours could well engage, or import a professional trapper or the plural, and thereby have the rabbits kept under control and with monetary profit to themselves.

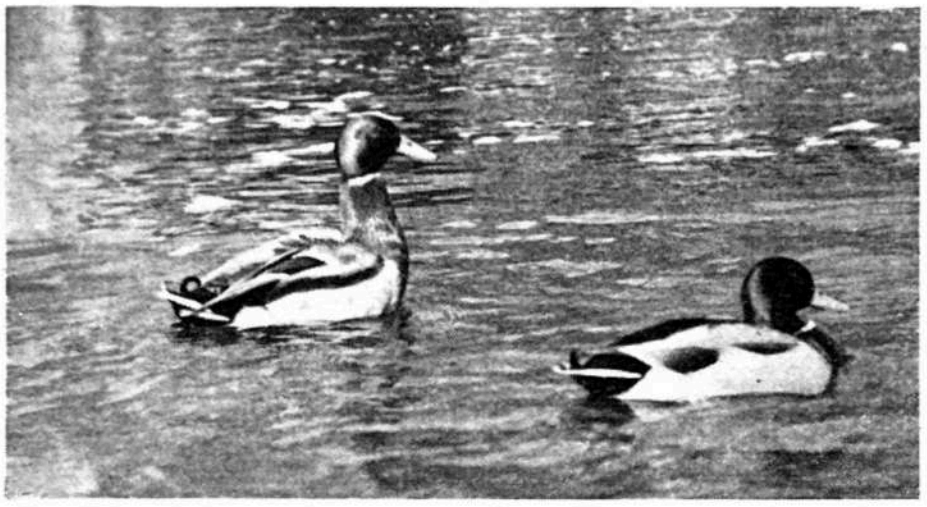
Probably there never were enough professional rabbit-catchers to go round the whole of the country, but the very great majority of farmers do not possess or work a vast acreage, and these could well allow one, two, or maybe three local men or lads of good character to be responsible for keeping down the rabbits on their land. They certainly need not carry guns, and though the common gin trap is on its way out, and will become illegal after July 31, 1958, there are more ways of catching rabbits than one—there are, best of all, snares; then there are ferreting and netting and long-netting, among the more conventional methods. At all events, keen rabbiters will quickly keep a farmer's stock of rabbits under good control, and, if they are unable to do so, then let him get other men with more energy and experience. Such men may be given the rabbits for their trouble, or some arrangement may be arrived at whereby the farmer makes a small profit for himself.

In fact, I imagine that, before very long, we shall be able to say of the rabbit situation: "This is where we came in, except that scientists and agriculturists with unsound ideas caused untold suffering to countless rabbits, and in many ways turned 'the balance of nature' into a number of wrong channels." But let us hear no more about the use of viruses in an attempt to wipe out an entire species in this fair land of ours.

Lough Neagh Journey

by L. Gowan

FOR once the promise of the publicity folders was fulfilled. Ulster was indeed lovely and the lush green landscape a tonic in itself. The food was good and the climate and the people friendly. The latter on the whole took a great interest in natural history and were obviously interested in the wild life around them. (Whilst I was watching wildfowl, for instance, a farm labourer working nearby volunteered the following information on their feeding habits; "the swans, he assured me, lived on frog's spawn, tadpoles and fish," and duck lived by "suckage." A very expressive word, "suckage.")



Two mallard were "sitting up" in the water . . .

As I stepped off the plane at the airport, I was greeted by a large group of about fifty to sixty hares, sitting up on their haunches by the airstrips, seemingly oblivious to aircraft landing and taking off nearby. Travelling through County Antrim along the quiet lanes with their high-banked hawthorn hedges gleaming white with blossom, I saw many more hares, sitting in groups in many small fields, in distinct contrast to my home district, where the hare is harried on all sides by lurchers and whippets.

My destination was Lough Neagh, that vast inland sea of a lake which is bordered by five out of the six Ulster counties, and incidentally, is the largest expanse of fresh water in the British Isles. I stayed at Antrim, near the north east tip of the lough, on one of the numerous small farms with which the district abounds, and it turned out to be a happy choice. The lough was only about half-a-mile distant and most of the neighbouring shores were part of the Shanes Castle estate belonging to Lord O'Neill, whose agent gave me permission to visit the grounds. He promised that I would "see plenty of wild life—badgers, otters, deer and numerous birds—" but go very quietly and don't disturb the nesting peasants." The keeper evidently had one hundred and fifty birds in the rearing field, but many more also nested wild in the woods.

Next morning, I walked through a fine wood on the estate, past the roofless ruins of Shanes Castle, with its row of ancient cannon pointing out over the lough. The lush grass underfoot was covered by a sea of sweet-smelling bluebells, and the last primroses gleamed on many a mossy bankside. Woodpigeon crooned all over the wood, and, in spite of my quiet tread, startled birds clapped out of various trees as I walked underneath. At the end of the ride, the view became more open. Typical parkland and rich pastures intermingled with patches of rushes and nettle beds, where corncrakes shouted discordantly. (Happily this bird is very common in Ulster and most suitable fields seem to hold a bird or two).

A curlew rose in front of me and flew quickly and silently in the direction of the lough; and there in the distance I could see the lough where the trees thinned out into hazel and alder thickets, and out in the bay, two or three small islands. I hurriedly crossed the pastures, disturbing one large rabbit, a seemingly healthy survivor of the myxomatosis ravages of late last year, and several deer which leaped gracefully over a four-foot fence.

As I came down towards the shore a woodcock flew up at my feet and flopped down dramatically about 10ft. away with a wing seemingly broken as it thrashed around on the ground, sending the dead leaves flying. Crouching where it had flown up I found two half-grown young with their quills just sprouting, and already coloured with the barred black, brown and buff plumage of the adult woodcock. The parent bird flew back to them immediately I left, its injured wing quickly mended! I crept down slowly through the bluebells, edging my way towards the glittering lough, and the sound of the waves lapping the alder roots, and finally I was there, crouching behind a bed of rushes and yellow flag irises, and, I swear, quivering like a pointing gundog!

I was looking out over a small reed-fringed bay dotted here and there with flat stones, most of which held a duck or two squatting in the morning sunshine preening themselves. Just a few feet from me was a sandbank covered with mallard, mainly drakes, in various stages of moult. Two cormorants flew over with heavy wingbeats and landed far out, on a large rock, to "hang out" their wings to dry. Scattered further out on the lough itself many duck were swimming and diving. Through my glasses I could make out mallard, tufted, shoveler, pintail, red-breasted mergansers, goldeneye and shelducks or "white ducks," as they are called locally. No teal, but I discovered later that they seemed to prefer the secluded small bays.

Mallard in Eclipse

Coot were everywhere and one pair, leading their ginger haired young through the alder roots, started an alarmed "*poot*" "*poot*" and "*peet*" "*peet*," and swam into cover as a great black back floated overhead, looking for prey. A waterhen stepped out with enormous strides over the sludge and disappeared in a hazel bush where I could see, in a fork, some rubbish which would be its nest. A sun-bleached branch across the bay materialised into a heron as the bird shifted position slightly and two drake mallard swam close inshore, only their chestnut breasts showing signs of the eclipse plumage, now in late May.

One of them "sat up" in the water just as I moved position slightly, a twig crunched, and with a roar of wings the spell was broken as all the birds took off, the heron to flap ponderously into the woods, and the duck to land with faint splashes far out on the lough.

As I waded out through the shallow water towards the nearest island, a grey crow came floating out of the wood behind me and veered off with a harsh *caw* as it saw me. This stimulated a pair of magpies in the wood as they started their harsh chatter in a thicket where no doubt they had their nest. Vermin birds and rats are distressingly common, by the lough where the pickings are rich, and many an otherwise well hidden nest is discovered by them, revealed by the duck as she goes off to feed. Most lakes with wooded shores will have the same story to tell.

I found a tufted's nest in a nettle bed, behind a shelter of stones erected by some

(Continued on page 558, col. 3)

Swans flying, and the air filled with the "woof-woof" of their mighty wings.

Memory Takes Me Back

by Neil McLean

MY memory takes me back to that river where I spent so many happy hours. Starting where it flows into Kilbrannon Sound on the east side of Kintyre, I find myself standing on silver sand stretching along the bay for over one mile.

On I go on up through the estuary where salmon and sea-trout come and go with the tide before making their way up to the higher reaches to their spawning grounds. Past the green banks covered with sea pink and water cress, where otters come ashore and sport themselves in moonlight or in the early hours of the morning, before man is afoot. Into the Kennels pool and over the man-made weir where wee "Widdie" caught so many finnock and could hold his own with his elders.

Round the corner now to the Island pool and on under the bridge to the Bowling Green pool. Yes, the pool that was poisoned by poachers, or is that a slur on poachers? On that morning salmon and sea-trout lay there mouths open in the agony in which they died, gasping for oxygen. On looking closer I remember seeing the small flounders the size of my thumbnail and the parr, the stock of years to come, yes, a sad memory indeed.

Let me leave that sad memory behind and move on to more pleasant memories. That struggle to land a salmon on a cast that was meant for a sea-trout. Carrying it home with its tail protruding over the edge of the gamebag. A happy memory indeed.

Up now to the bank covered with gorse where the mergansers nested and reared their young successfully, only to have them picked up and devoured by the black-backed gulls as they made their way to the sea.

On the right bank with its green fields stands a farmhouse, a farmhouse that was my home for so many years. Its name in English means "the barren field" but from what I remember of it its fields were not barren, which can be proved by seeing its heavy crops of golden grain swaying in an August breeze.

Acrobatic Eagles

In the glen on my left, the golden eagles nest and many times they have entertained me with an acrobatic display in the air. I have seen the cock bird come in with a heather stock in his talons, drop it and catch it again before it had fallen any great distance. The wooded slopes of this glen are the haunt of the roe, the foreigner that was introduced—the Jap or Siki deer, the fox and the badger. Much time can be spent watching its bird life. In the cypress the bullfinches nest and in the more open patches of bog myrtle the hen-harriers nest and chase and catch pippets to feed their hungry young. Before I come to the first Bailey bridge I pass the enlarged rabbit burrow where the otters scraped out the earth and reared their family and taught them to kill frogs and eels in the surrounding bogs.

The stretch above the Bailey bridge I remember well. That warm summer day when my yellow labrador entered the water to cool herself. On seeing the form of the bitch above it, a salmon panicked and left the pool and as it made its way over the shallows I lifted the gun and in a moment of weakness I shot it, before it could reach the sanctuary of the pool below. Incidentally that salmon was never recorded in the fish book!

Above this stretch of water there stands a cottage. A cottage I called home for ten years. In this small garden attached to the cottage, and helped by my wife, I grew the big onions and the lovely chrysanthemums that took first prize at the local show. And in that same garden I buried the bowls of bulbs to make root before taking them into the house in preparation for the show. And well I remember learning that I had won 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes out of a class of thirty-two.

It was here, too, that I reared budgerigars and when one hen had eight eggs, too many for her to rear, I took out four and put them in a tree sparrow's nest, after removing the sparrow's clutch. She made a perfect foster-mother.

The author holds a 2-week-old eaglet.

My memory takes me on upstream, on to the next bridge. Standing on this bridge I remember with the river low and the sun in a certain position, I could see the monsters lying there side by side. I have spent many of my evenings casting over them times without number only to go home disappointed and smelling of a midge repellent. But the black pool above was kinder to me, it made up for some of the disappointment I suffered below in the Bridge pool. With the help of a friend, a keeper, I hooked and landed a 10 pounder. After celebrating my success I went home elated and smelling, but not of midge repellent.

And so on up to where the river leaves the valley into the moors. The river here is very overgrown with oak, birch and alder, but it still holds my interest.

The Old Still

It was here in the wooded burns which help to feed the river, that I found the remains of the old whisky stills used many years before by the inhabitants of the glen.

It was here too that the great flocks of black-game fed on the birches in the days before the second world war. Now today, if I were going back, I might see a dozen if I were lucky.

It was above this same scrub one day when the ground was covered with snow that I shot a blackcock and as it fell my labrador bitch went out to retrieve it. As she approached her quarry, she was almost robbed of it by an eagle that swooped to get an easy meal. But the bitch beat the king of birds to it and retrieved the cock actually from under the intruder's wings.

Loch Under Fire

Now in memory I have reached the junction where the river splits into three. One to the right, one straight on and one to the left. If my memory serves me right the stream to the right takes me to a small boggy loch into which the big battleships, during the early part of the war, fired their shells in practice for bigger things to come.

If I go straight on I'll come to another hill loch where I could spend my time fishing for loch trout.

To the left would take me past the tree where the kestrels have taken possession of the hoodies' old nest and are out killing voles that infest the young plantation near by.

On now to the bank where the dipper has nestled and she is out hunting too, but her quarry is the caddis grub, those grubs we see covered with small twigs or particles of gravel at the bottom of the pool when we stoop to take a drink of the cool clear water.

And finally out on to the moor where a streak of blue catches my eye as it flashes past and I know that the merlin has nested and is rearing her young in a depression, scraped by herself, that she calls a nest.

My memory has taken me back.

GAME FISH INQUIRY

THE Salmon and Trout Association is sponsoring a conference in November to discuss the conservation of game fish.

The conference is in effect open to anyone.

It will be held in Ironmongers' Hall on November 6 and 7, and the Fishmongers' Company have generously invited the conference to dinner in Fishmongers' Hall on the evening of November 6. The conference will be opened at 2.30 p.m. on the first day by Lord Hollenden. Lord Lovat will speak on "The Problems that Confront the Manager of a Salmon River" and Mr. R. W. Melvin will follow on the subject of "The Water Supply Industry and its Fishing."

On November 7 Mr. R. S. Fort will speak (at 10 a.m.) on "The Control of Salmon Netting," and at 11 a.m. Mr. C. V. Hancock will discuss "The Problems that Confront a Provincial Game Fishing Club." A closing address will be made by Lord Hollenden at noon.

Papers are being printed and distributed to those who attend in order to leave as much time as possible for discussion. The fee for attendance is 25s., and anyone interested should write soon to the Hon. Secretary, The Salmon and Trout Association, Fishmongers' Hall, London, E.C.4.

The Bog House, former home of gamekeepers.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

ALTHOUGH duck flighting is generally assumed to be an evening sport, it may sometimes be practised successfully in the morning; but conditions must be suitable. On the bog at the head of Bassenthwaite Lake, for instance, we did our flighting in the evening, because we discovered that a satisfactory bag could only be made then; and the reason for this was obvious. The duck spent the day on a comparatively large sheet of water, and their feeding places were mainly remote from the lake head; so we had to be right at the edge of the lake in the evening. If we had stood, say, half a mile up the bog in the neighbourhood of the Bog House, the duck would have been quite out of shot; and if that had not been so, the byegone keepers who lived in that isolated abode might have done all their flighting from the front door.

Now, one might have thought that these duck would have provided the same amount of sport in reverse at dawn; but they did not. Even at the lake head they were usually about two shot lengths up. Evidently they preferred to alight on the lake as far from the shore as possible; and the water, being several miles in length, was so extensive that they could circle as often as they liked without presenting themselves as targets to anyone on land. No doubt, they paddled occasionally within range of the lake head as the day advanced, but that had little to do with the flight at daybreak.

Beside a smaller sheet of water, however, flighting can be very successful in the morning. The duck come in at a good height, then they circle, perhaps a few times, before they settle; and if the shooters are well hidden, the fun can be fast and furious. I know of one artificial lake in the policies of a Scottish estate where this morning flight is a great success, providing that the duck are not shot at too often during the season. Indeed there could be no evening flight of any importance on this artificial lake, because the whole company of duck would clear off at the first shot. This lake has provided bags of over 100 duck (all wild birds) at a morning flight, which is more than I have ever seen killed at an evening flight from lakes of much greater size.

A Little Strategy

I must reveal, of course, that the shooting beside this Scottish lake was helped considerably by a little strategy. On the morning of a shoot two keepers prevented any duck from seeking sanctuary on the river a mile away. Therefore, they gave excellent sport even when the grey dawn had given way to full daylight. At the head of Bassenthwaite Lake, on the other hand, the duck were not only too high at dawn, but the flight was over in a few minutes. To compensate for this, the evening flight could last for half an hour, particularly if the weather were inclined to be stormy.

One difference among others which concerns those two forms of duck flighting is the amount of cover necessary for the shooters. In the evening one can generally crouch among the rushes until the light is so poor that the overhead duck are only silhouettes, then one may stand up without spoiling any chances. But for morning flighting to a small sheet of water a hide is necessary, otherwise the quarry will sheer off as the daylight advances. A sunken barrel inside a low butt of rushes laced through wire-netting makes the best hide for this purpose that I have seen, although it is likely to need a bale out before it can be occupied. At one end of this Scottish lake which I have mentioned there were three sunken barrels, and it was my duty to see they were emptied of water before a shoot. To accomplish this object satisfactorily I had sometimes to reach them in the blackness of a winter's night when the duck were away feeding.

Temporary Sport

Apart from those two main forms of flighting, good shooting can also be had at times beside the feeding places of duck, although the sport may only be temporary; for duck, like most other birds, soon learn to avoid an area where they get a hot reception. Nevertheless, a stand beside a field of flattened grain, or beside an open pool or stream in hard weather, can yield bags of sufficient size to satisfy most people. When frost is very severe, however, and duck are practically starving, genuine sportsmen do not avail themselves of this advantage. It is then that the pothunters and poachers appear to harry the unfortunate birds, often for the greater part of a moonlight night. Someone may wonder how any pool or stream can remain open in really Arctic weather, such as we had in 1947, but certain substances in the water apparently decide whether it shall freeze easily or not. To give one example, the Pow Beck in this valley has never to my knowledge been completely frozen, although it is quite sluggish.

But at the beginning of the wildfowling season flighting of any kind is not particularly successful. The migratory duck are not here, and the native birds are late on the move. In fact, many of them spend the whole of their time on the weedy lakesides where they can find enough to eat, and where they can find cover to hide themselves from their enemies, except from the man with a gun who is prepared to wade in water and stinking mud above the knees in search of sport. I confess that I have enjoyed shooting of this sort often, although it is seldom spectacular. No doubt, much of the fun comes (as it does in grouse shooting) from the surroundings, and from the unconscious knowledge that the open season has just begun, plus genial weather.

This is a sport which appeals greatly to the young shot. He does not mind in the least if he is plastered with mud to the waist. On he forges through the reeds with the sun beaming strongly on his perspiring face. Occasionally he has to advance with caution in case he slips too deeply into the mud. Without warning a duck rises in shot. Up goes the gun, and down comes the bird (we hope!). As the report echoes across the bog another score of duck rise quacking all over the expanse of reeds. Down goes the excited shooter as low as he can go without being totally submerged, and he gets his reward when several duck come high over him. A quick right and left account for a brace of better sporting quality, but they may not be so easy to collect, if they fall far behind. It can be extremely difficult to mark birds which drop a long way off in tall reeds, and dogs are at a disadvantage where the reeds are growing from a foot or more of water.

Hard To Find

In fact, dogs of average ability are often at a disadvantage among reeds, whether they are growing in water or not, even when the birds are dead, and have been marked fairly accurately. I have lost dozens of duck at bogland shoots merely because they had been driven by their own momentum well into the bottom of the cover. This disadvantage is aggravated, of course, when the marking is vague; and this is likely to happen when the duck have fallen at the far side of a water. way which can only be crossed here and there. In circumstances of this kind it is wise to leave a gamebag or some other distinctive object on the near side, so that there may be something to guide the searcher on the far side if his dog fails to find the quarry.

The vexation of losing duck at the far side of unjumpable waterways was so well recognised on our own bog that we had a survey of all the plank bridges before the season opened, and replaced any which had been broken or washed away by floods. Incidentally, wooden bridges on bogs ought to be wired down to well driven posts. This precaution does not always save them from being torn adrift, but it helps to hold them for a few years.

On two occasions that I remember a lack of bridges at the right places caused two men to make fools of themselves in front of their companions. The first one, a keeper, located a green island in the middle of a waterway which offered the means of making a crossing in a couple of jumps. His first spring landed him halfway, but alas! the "island" proved to be a mass of floating weed, and he whizzed through up to his waist.

The second man was a beater. He failed to realise that a bogland waterway does not always have very definite banks; so he made a magnificent jump on to the vegetation at the far side,

(Continued on page 559, col. 3)

HOGMANAY GOOSE

by Sea-Hawk

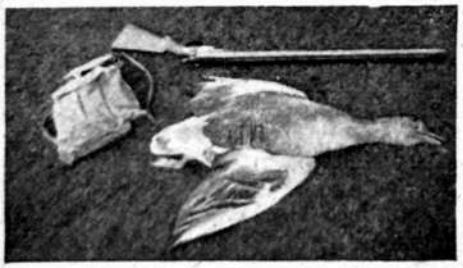
IT all started during a week-end leave in Scotland. On a mild afternoon late in January I had taken my two sons out in the car with the object of having a walk over the moors. As the watery light began to fade we were sitting resting on the top of a hill when I first saw the geese, a skein of about thirty birds. Though still far to the north-east, there was no mistaking their purposeful flight, and, enthralled, I watched them cut high across the evening sky. Where was their feeding ground, I wondered, and where were they bound?

The second question was soon answered, when from almost overhead the skein planed down and with a final "whiffle" pitched on to a small lochan three-quarters of a mile away. We walked back to the car and drove home. The next day I travelled south to join my ship, but I left a large scale Ordnance Survey map suitably marked to remind me. As though that was necessary . . .

Two years later found me in the same part of Scotland over Christmas, and on Boxing Day I set forth to take a second and closer look at Lochan na Gavin. From the map it appeared that a track led to a farm near to water, so I went to call on the farmer. He, a Mr. Logie, was very helpful; he welcomed me to shoot geese and duck on the lochan, but had neither heard nor seen any geese for ten days or so; in fact, not since the last hard frost. Having thanked him, I walked down to the water's edge and sat down to watch. Shooting could wait, but not for too long.

Food for Thought

My previous experience of inland geese had been limited to shooting pinkfeet over decoys, and I suspected the birds on the lochan were greylags. That the moon was just past full was also food for thought. Would inland birds flight all through the night like their coastal cousins? Or, for that matter, did they clear off entirely at the first freeze-up of the winter? I left long after dark none the wiser, but decided that my next visit would be at dawn.



A welcome present any Hogmanay.

Two mornings later it was blowing a full gale from the south-west, and there was more than a touch of sleet in the wind. I was full of hope as I staggered through darkness and peat bog towards the windward side of the lochan. Under such conditions surely no goose would be too high for BB from a choked 10-bore. No goose was — none appeared. However, a couple of mallard and a cock wigeon got the "de'il oot the bag," but geese, neither flighted out nor in, although I waited until after midday.

It must have been Fate that prompted me, as I was returning across the moor, to hail the shepherd lad. In reply to my questions, he said that in the dawn mist of the previous morning he had walked into a gaggle of geese feeding on a moorland farm about three miles to the south. This lucky meeting clarified many points; the effect of the moon was confirmed, the flight line established, and the feeding area known; even to the name of the farm and its owner. The prospects were much brighter.

Alastair, my brother-in-law, does not shoot, but he had become infected with goose fever, so he joined me that afternoon when I called on Mr. Thompson of Langdyke, who willingly gave me permission to pursue wild geese on his land, so long as I let him know each time I was out. He showed us the lie of the land, but did not have any precise knowledge of the movements of the gaggle. Without more ado we dressed up and set off for some high ground where the moor marched with the farm. We had just crossed the first field when a skein of nine geese flew over without a sound, taking us by surprise; we dived under the hedge, and I hurriedly began to call to them. The skein circled twice (in response to my calling I like to think) without coming within shot, and eventually settled in a field half a mile away.

A careful approach brought us to about three hundred yards of the gaggle, and from there we could see that there were some thirty birds in all, feeding and preening. The complete lack of cover made it futile to attempt to stalk right up to them, so we agreed to split up. Alastair was to work his way around the gaggle while I crawled as near to it as the ground would allow, in the hope that when he flushed the geese they would give me a shot. The best laid schemes . . . but it was thrilling to have been so close to the quarry just before they disappeared over the moor towards the lochan. For the rest of the afternoon and long into the dusk we waited in a ditch beside the field, but neither heard nor saw any more geese. Their absence and the behaviour of the birds we had stalked seemed evidence that their night feeding phase was over.

New Year's Eve

The next day was December 31; early in the afternoon, having called at Langdykes, I again made for the high ground beside the moor. On opening the gate from the farmyard, to my disappointment, I flushed the geese from the adjoining field and watched them go over the moor to Lochan na Gavin. It was a pretty despondent fowler who eventually settled into a ditch under the wind-blown hawthorn trees. However, my hopes revived when twenty minutes later a small skein of geese flew overhead. I am sure that they did not see me, but call as I would they took no notice. Finally they dropped into a field about a mile to the south. Knowing from previous experience that the ground was unsuitable for stalking, I decided to move to the southern side of the same field, and again found a shallow ditch screened by a stunted hawthorn hedge. From my new position I could cover many fields to the south; the most careful search with binoculars failed to find any geese. A steady breeze was blowing from the south, and I felt certain that I would hear any sounds from the feeding gaggle. As the early frost silvered the grass, the silence was cut by a terrific rush of wings as a flock of golden plover passed inches high over the field behind me. A hare loped by and began to feed a few yards away, quite unaware of my presence.

Then at last a goose called, then another and another. They sounded to be close and right in front of me, and my whole being strained to catch sight of them as I crouched tense in the ditch. After what seemed ages, the skein flew over a row of beech trees at the top of my field and well beyond gunshot. In the anti-climax of that moment I felt sure that the flight was over, and that a new year would have arrived before my goose chase ended successfully.

Rather dejectedly I began to put my binoculars and groundsheet in my bag, admiring the apple green of the frosty gloaming, when a single goose note cut through the dusk. I dived for the cover of the nearest hawthorn, and seconds later I saw about fifteen geese rising to clear the hedge forty yards to the right. I swung the old 10-bore on the nearest bird and fired, to see it come crashing down with a resounding thud far behind. In case it was a runner I dashed out; my haste was unnecessary, but its weight confirmed it to be a greylag. Jubilantly I strolled back to the car, reliving those precious few seconds so that the memory would be with me always.

I expect you remember the part of Ian Pitman's superb book, "And Clouds Flying," in which he tells of shooting his first goose, also on the last day of the year, and of the old local fowler asking him why the hell he didn't fire the other barrel. In the excitement of killing his first goose, he forgot to. So did I that night. Still, no goose I have shot, before or since, has given me such a thrill or such satisfaction; it had taken two years, but there was a completeness about the whole thing. And an 8½lb. greylag is a welcome present any Hogmanay.

Lough Neagh Journey

(Continued from page 555)

enterprising wildfowler, and surrounded by cartridge cases in various stages of decomposition. It seemed incongruous that the bird should set up house there on the site of ambush for so many of its tribe, but I did not have time to ponder on the mysteries of life as a squall seemed to be brewing up. The wind had risen and I waded back to the shore with white-tipped waves curling round my calves and hurried into the woods as the first raindrops beat on my back. I pulled my shoes and stockings back on and crawled into a holly bush, to the accompaniment of the *hor—hor—hor* of the crow in a nearby pine tree, and the terrifying squeals, grunts, groans, and snarls coming from a heronry in the treetops as the nearly full-grown herons flapped wildly to keep their foothold on the swaying branches.

The shower blew over, the wind dropped, and soon the wet leaves and grass glittered in the sun. Two shelduck flew over with chuckling quacks as I made my way to a neighbouring small bay they chortled away before landing. I came out on a marshy shore with my feet squelching in the ooze as three coots swam hurriedly away from nearby clumbs of rushes, where they no doubt had their nests. And so it proved. Lough Neagh coots evidently have an independent outlook compared with their British counterparts and it is an amusing (and common) sight to see one cock bird chase another furiously for a slight infringement of "territorial waters," even though their respective mates sit placidly on nests less than ten feet apart.

A flock of twenty swans flew by and the air filled with the *woof, woof* of their mighty wings, and out on the lough a non-breeding herd of the same birds swam slowly inshore as a motor-boat went by. Several great-crested grebes floating in the bay craned their necks and dived suddenly, coming up at varying distances away. But I was expected back for lunch and had to go, walking back regretfully through the woods, and leaving behind the sounds and smells of the lough.

In the evening, I came down again to the lough. The water was calm and the blue hills in the distance merged gently with the horizon. A solitary duck swam by slowly leaving a long ripple in its wake. It had been a good day—and there were more to come.

DECOYING ROOKS AND JACKDAWS

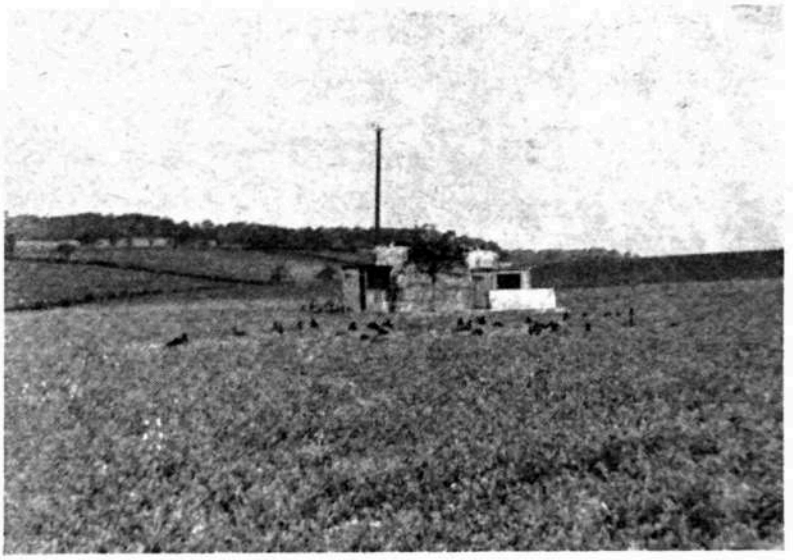
by Bona Fide

This is the second of two articles, the first of which appeared on August 10.—Editor.

AS I made clear in my last article, rooks and jackdaws will decoy just as well as pigeon; in fact, for those who like to shoot everything on the wing, I would say they decoy better because they keep together more and give more chance of getting a right and left, if you are quick enough to get on to that second bird. And if that second bird happens to be a jackdaw you will have to be very quick indeed, for he is a cunning fellow, darting and twisting like a corkscrew.

The rook is a much easier target, being slower in his movements and more like the woodpigeon in the way he decoys. With woodpigeon, where there are more than one, I find that often a leading bird will come in before the others, and if you let him come right in, hoping to get a right and left at his followers, it often happens that the leader will spot the decoys are fakes and turn away quickly, taking the others with him. It often happens to me and I tell myself it serves me right for being greedy.

There is no doubt whatever that the rook population in my district is increasing at an alarming rate. I have about 3,000 rooks roosting in one of my woods alone. They come here every year as soon as the young ones leave the rookery and stay until my barley begins to ripen, so this year "A" and I thought we would try and scotch them before they could do too much damage. We built a hide out of two chicken houses which happened to be on a field of trefoil near their favourite wood, making it up with baled straw between the two houses, and then we moved in one evening recently, about 6 p.m., to await events. As the birds began to come over we picked off one or two, and set them up as decoys—ending with a bag of 46. This seems to have frightened them off for the moment, and they are now roosting in a neighbour's wood!



A hide made of bales between two chicken houses.

Alone and in Droves

To my mind, there are two kinds of rooks, those which go about in large droves, and those you see walking round the fields in solitude. It is the big droves (usually 50 per cent jackdaws) that do the damage; and I have known farmers who have had to have a man doing nothing else but scare birds when they came over in these large droves.

The same probably applies to pigeon. It is not the solitary woodpigeon you hear cooing in the tree at the bottom of your garden, getting his food locally, that does harm, it is the droves roaming about the countryside. It may be objected that they split up anyway at this time of the year to nest, and only gang up again in the winter. No doubt this is true of some, but from my own observation there is a difference in the type of bird. For instance only this morning I drove my Landrover up to a gate, got out to open it, and above my head on a dead branch about 10ft. up, sat a woodpigeon cooing away; when I opened the gate, drove through and shut the gate again, the pigeon was quite unmoved though it was in full view all the time, and even when I looked up and cooed back, it only rolled its eyes and went on cooing. Now, I will bet anyone that this is not the sort of bird that goes out to feed with the droves in the winter.

Rooks and pigeon can be decoyed together. On one occasion this year we were pigeon shooting on some late sowing, and when after killing fifty, the pigeon stopped coming for a bit, a rook came flying over. "A" shot it and we pegged it out with the pigeon—and finished the day with 72 pigeon and 42 rooks. Another interesting point about that day is that we left all the rooks and pigeon lying about the field together, only about half of them pegged up, the rest just as they dropped when shot.

To add to the rest of his sins, the rook is an egg eater. I know there are people who will contend that he is being blamed for what the carrion crow does, but in hay-time last year I saw for myself. We happened to cut over a partridge nest with 15 eggs in it and as there were a couple of partridges nearby I went to a hedgerow and cut some branches with plenty of green leaf, to stick in the ground by the nest for cover. No sooner had the mowing machine left the field than the rooks arrived, in search, no doubt, of the masses of insects that are to be found in a field of new-mown hay. I could see they were walking in the direction of the nest, so I got my field glasses and watched to see what happened. Suddenly, a rook saw the eggs, grabbed one and flew off, and immediately there was a mad scramble among the others for the eggs. I think that is proof enough.

Plenty of Rooks

The young rooks did well this year. There is a large rookery in the grounds of a lovely old country house, which "A" and I shoot every year, and on May 14 three of us killed 700, of which at least 500 were killed flying; we went again a week later and killed another 300. Last year a lot of the young birds died in the nest (though we did kill about 500) and we think they probably had coccidiosis.

It is an odd fact that rooks like to have their rookeries near big houses. For instance, there are five rookeries within a radius of two miles in this area, each of which is in the grounds of an old country house; and this is not because they are the only available sites, for there are plenty of clumps of tall elm trees scattered about the countryside which one would have thought ideal nesting places. On the other hand, I have heard of a man who badly wanted a rookery on his estate, and even went to the length of having dummy nests built in his trees to encourage them, but the rooks refused to oblige.

The age to which rooks and jackdaws live is a matter for debate, but I would say, at a guess, up to about thirty years. I understand that ravens are long-lived birds, and as the rook belongs to the same family, it may well live even longer than that. If any readers have information on the subject I would like to hear from them. On the subject of age, I was once told by the owner of a tame woodpigeon that it had lived 16 years, and I have also heard of a wild rabbit that had been kept in captivity for 14 years, and was still alive at that time.

One or Two Eyes

I mentioned in my last article the difficulty of shooting jackdaws coming in to roost. I am probably handicapped in this type of shooting because I have the bad habit of closing one eye, and naturally one can see better out of two eyes than one. After reading about it in Robert Churchill's book "Game Shooting," and also "Petrel's" article on the subject, I tried to cure myself; but having closed one eye regularly for 30 years, I found it an almost impossible task; the moment my gun comes up to the shoulder my left eye automatically closes, and although I can now shoot with both eyes open when I am concentrating hard, the moment I relax I go back to one.

I think it must be an asset to use both eyes naturally, because sometimes when I have been out shooting with "A" and have brought down a pigeon, he has said, "Why didn't you shoot at the other one?" when I hadn't even seen it! He, lucky fellow, learned to use both eyes from the start, while I caught the one-eye habit from my father at the tender age of seven.

Round the Game Preserves

(Continued from page 557)

and also whizzed through up to his waist. These incidents provided practical proof that bridges were necessary on that bog, although heavy planks and posts would not have been easily carried over the treacherous ground. It would naturally have been impossible to operate mechanical transport in the same area.

I have said that this early season duck shooting appeals to the young shot; but apart from providing him with sport which is not too difficult, it provides him with valuable training in fieldcraft. He soon learns that duck can be very alert, and he approaches the waterways with caution here and there, instead of walking openly along the whole length of the banks. He also discovers that he will get more chances if he crouches and waits occasionally after he has fired at a bird, instead of retrieving it at once; and he will quickly realise that it is better to withhold a reckless shot, or a shot at, say, a snipe, if there is the possibility of finding something better in front. In short, it is now that he can get a proper introduction to the fascinating sport of wildfowling.

Fisherman's Diary

VISITORS to the south-west coast in the week-end after the Bank Holiday were provided with a free show by a run of abnormally high tides. Although the highest for about 40 years they had, of course, been predicted, and precautionary measures had been taken wherever necessary.

Crowds waited at many points to see the tide reach its highest level. At Lynmouth, where four successive tides rose about 35ft., the waters just lapped over the new harbour arm. Ilfracombe had a 32ft. tide and Minehead one of 38ft. Fortunately the tides were peaceful, gently attaining their greatest height and falling away with the ebb.

Most of the visitors preferred watching high tides lap over jetties and embankments to a study of the sea-bed at the low tide. The abnormal "highs" were matched by abnormal "lows," and though a wide expanse of mud, sand or shingle may be less thrilling than a dangerously high tide, it is far more interesting. Bait pickers, naturalists, sea anglers, cockle gatherers—and, of course, children, took full advantage of an opportunity to walk almost dry-shod over areas that had never been uncovered before within the memory of the majority of them. It was an ideal time to gather such baits as clams and red-nosed cockles, and several species of crabs beside the common shore crab. Unfortunately these baits do not preserve well, and they were not much use at the time, for I am told that inshore angling during this period (and for a week before it) was hopeless for any species except bass.

Several local sea anglers took careful note of the nature and configuration of the extra areas of sea bed exposed, for it was into those that they had been casting for years without knowing exactly what was there. Estuary anglers, too, had a remarkable view of their fishing grounds. Except for the trickle of fresh water brought down by the rivers, the Taw and Torridge estuaries were completely uncovered at low tide.

Lyn Salmon

The Lyn cannot be regarded as a first-class salmon and sea-trout river, though it is said that the run has improved with restoration work which followed the 1952 disaster.

The high tides of August, 1956, however, brought with them an abnormally heavy run of salmon, many of which, according to local reports, came to a sticky end at the hands of poachers in the narrow and easily accessible middle reaches.

Carp Ponds

Given the right conditions, carp grow at an astonishing rate. Continental fish breeders know this full well, and in Germany, Poland, Czecho-Slovakia and Hungary (and probably in other countries which I do not know) carp are bred in fish farms and fattened up to the best weight for the market in a very short time. The English people have lost their taste for carp. The Irish, Scots and Welsh never acquired it. In the British Isles, therefore, in this era, carp are valuable only as sporting fish.

That they are sporting fish there can be no doubt. Anyone who has hooked and netted a carp of 8lb. or more will need no assurance on this point.

Mr. Richard Walker's record carp weighed 44lb. It was taken from Redmire, a pond that has also produced a 31-pounder and many carp of more than 20lb. All, I believe (including the record fish), were less than 17 years old.

Most anglers who lay plans for future fishing will want an earlier return than this, even though the growth of the carp concerned was of phenomenal rapidity. They need not wait so long if they are prepared to make do with 10 or 12lb carp.

There are many instances of carp attaining those weights in eight or nine years. Seven years ago the Huntspill River (an artificial water that held no carp) was stocked with young carp. Earlier this month an angler caught one that weighed 9lb. 14oz.

Fish like this make first-class sport, and if they are returned alive (as they should be) the potential is likely to improve. I started this note with the words: "given the right conditions." Redmire Poole is full of carp food—bloodworms in the mud and a massed array of assorted animaculae in the plants. The food supply can hardly be quite so good on the Huntspill, but it still fattens carp quickly.

Practical Application

There must be scores of readers who own ponds or who could, for no more than the asking, get permission to stock, "mess about with," and eventually fish, ponds in their neighbourhood.

If the ponds already support a large population of insects, molluscs, crustaceans, etc., the matter is easy. If they do not, some preliminary work on establishing aquatic plants and introducing animaculae will be necessary. The most important point is to buy a strain of quick-growing carp from a reliable and experienced fish-farmer. A few dozen carp of unknown origin netted from some nearby water are not likely to grow at the rate envisaged above.

Prevailing Winds

Three years ago I quoted the centuries-old piece of doggerel:

When the wind is in the north
Clever anglers go not forth.
When the wind is in the east
That's the wind the fish like least.
When the wind is in the west,
That's the wind the fish like best.
But when the wind is in the south
It blows the bait in fish's mouth.

I commented then that British anglers were once lucky (if the verse were true) because the prevailing winds were south-westerly. Note the past tense. I continued: "For more than a year now winds seem to have been blowing regularly from the north and east, and south-westerlies have been rare."

I make rough notes of weather conditions, and nothing I have put down in the last three years causes me to change my view. In my part of the world a wind from the south to west quarter is now the exception rather than the rule.

Graceless Grayling

I have never been in sympathy with the trout angler who applied the term "graceless" to grayling. From the opening of the trout season until June 16 (when their season opens) grayling are a godforsaken nuisance, but that is not their fault.

From then on there seems to be a conspiracy to regard them as hardly respectable poor relations until the trout season ends. In this interim period you will see a guest in an angling hotel lay out half-a-dozen 1lb. grayling and a ¼lb. trout and hear him say airily: "Only a ¼-pounder and some grayling."

Once the trout season ends anglers and angling writers burst into a paean of praise about a species that has been there for the catching since June 16. The hypocrisy of it all lies in the fact that the grayling-catcher of October is so often the grayling-traducer of August. Catch your grayling now, and be proud of them. Real anglers will share your pleasure: only the inexperienced will look down snobbish noses at them.

CORIDON.

GUN GOSSIP

by North Country

AMONG a batch of pamphlets which has reached me from B.S.A. Guns Ltd., is one on their single twelve shot gun. I think it is a notable fact that single 12s have gained such popularity since the end of the last war. It is scarcely possible to look into the windows of any gun shop these days without seeing a single barrel of one make or another. Clearly the cult of the single 12 is on and we can expect to see a lot more of these guns in the future. Yet just before the war it seemed to me that their day was over, though I can well remember when such guns were regularly made and listed by leading manufacturers. I did hear the export figures of one firm in this line a few years ago. They were quite staggering—but I must not divulge what was given me in confidence.

These guns, I see, are made for long-range shooting. They are full choke and bored for 2¾ or 3 inch cartridges. In view of the circumstances under which certainly many of them will be used I think this is the right policy. But if the rabbit was still with us, I do not know that I should be so keen on that full choke. Assuming that the average gun would come in for its share of ferreting, its pattern would be closer than is advisable for this sort of shooting. Were rabbits still about, I should prefer a half choke in my single. As a youth I remember the American-made singles in my part of the country. Many small farmers and small-holders used them. Most of these guns were full choke and how they shot rabbits to pieces!

To-day the pigeon is the main target. You can of course, put too many pellets into a pigeon and as in the case of other game, spoil it for table purposes. But, in practice, you seldom seem to do this.

The answer is that the general range at which pigeon are shot is greater than ferreting range. It is surprising how quickly a pigeon, which bustles out of a hedge or bush in front of you, will put 35 yards between you and it. At that range no full choke will be too much for it. Rather it is as well to have the assistance of a choke. For a strong-flying pigeon is at the same time a small bird—it needs pattern and plenty of it to bring it safely to account.

Air Rifles

Another pamphlet deals with those ever-popular arms—air rifles. For example, the .177 "Club" and the .22 "Airsporter." Serious shooting—whether at the target or at pests in and about the garden and curtilage of the house—can be undertaken with these rifles. The .22, owing to its heavier bullet and greater power, is my choice for pest shooting, but naturally it is heavier. But this is a point for the individual to decide. It is as well to remember that you need a gun licence if you carry and use these weapons beyond the curtilage.

The use of an air rifle is an immensely important stepping stone in the early days of the young shooter. I attach great value to the few years when this was my one and only weapon. I can, too, say that the first rabbit (a very diminutive youngster, but all the same, a rabbit) that I can claim fell to my air-gun—at a range of about 5 yards! That was quite an event. Moreover I learned about the ways of wild life by being constantly about the fields and the rivers. And, incidentally, I learned something about rifle shooting.

Careful gun handling is just as important on the muds, where one little slip can land you in a lot of trouble.

The Young Shot

Loose Ends

by Petrel

WITH only a week to go before we get down to the serious, full-time business of shooting, I am taking this opportunity of tidying up a few loose ends. And the obvious start seems to be where I left off last week in a discussion of decoys. I was concerned primarily with pigeon decoys, and still am, but the same sort of basic principles apply whenever decoys of any sort are used.

All the decoys in the world will be of no help to the shooter if he fails to place them in the right place. And the right place is not always the most obvious one. If birds are feeding on one particular field, or one special part of it, such as a patch of laid corn, the siting of decoys is simple enough, but so often the situation arises when the pigeon are not interested in one spot to the exclusion of all others, but using a general flight-line as they work from one field to another. Cover may be scarce and the object then is not so much to bring the birds into a solid mass of decoys, as to attract them within range of the hide on a wide front. It is an advantage then to spread out the decoy birds as the ground and the flight line dictate.

Three Guns' Work

Last Monday afternoon was a case in point. The pigeon were working a large wheat field across one end of which ran a deep, dry ditch—the ideal hide—along one side of which a thorn hedge provided head cover and a good camouflaging background. The wind was blowing towards the ditch, in which I stood, and seventy yards to my left was a clump of oak trees. A similar distance away on the right stood three elms. Behind me was a bare meadow. I set out four decoys on sticks so that they were just below the level of the standing corn in front of me, placed one on either flank atop the hedge and another five in the grass field directly behind me. Most of the birds which came my way were heading for, or past, the trees, out of range, and had no intention of pitching straight into the corn. On spotting the decoys, birds on the right swung in a wide sweep behind me and made for the trees on my left and similarly the left hand birds turned for the elms on the right. As they came back, nearly all of them flew within range. In this way I managed adequately to cover a front on which, without decoys, three guns would have been needed.

It is not often that one finds the ideal pigeon hide ready made. There have been very few occasions on which I have been able to move straight into a vantage point which has needed no addition or subtraction of some sort to make it suitably comfortable or effective. And usually it turns out that those spots which look ideal have some drawback or other. The other day, I found the nearest thing to a perfect hide in a belt of trees bordering a cornfield. Someone in the past had grubbed out an oak and the hole which had been left in the sloping bank formed a perfect one-man weapon pit, almost four feet deep. Overhanging branches from neighbouring oaks provided overhead cover, and the tall grass and corn at the edge of the field screened me from birds approaching from or crossing my front. Nevertheless, there was still one blind spot and I was unable to shoot at high birds coming straight in over my head, unless I saw them in good time and scrambled out of the pit to stand in the shadow of the drooping branches. Then, when the pigeon was in range, I stepped into the open and fired after the bird had jinked, before it had time to fly out of range. As it happened the wind made most of the birds come in low—a factor which I had not failed to predict—so it made little difference, but once in a hide one wants to stay put and command every field of fire without having to scramble about in frantic efforts to deal with birds which one minute are hidden and the next in view.

A Worthwhile Weight

There is no point in choosing the thickest piece of cover available just for the sake of being hidden. It may be nowhere near the birds' line of flight. One must be prepared to adapt existing cover or to build a hide in a place far from the nearest hedge, tree or ditch, and that is why my bag always contains raw materials such as string, a few thin stakes, camouflage netting, a gas cape, hedging knife or billhook, besides decoys and extra cartridges. Granted, it is quite a weight to carry to the chosen position, but once there its contents may make the difference between a good hide, plus a good bag, and an inadequate uncomfortable ambush, which always means less birds, due to lack of concealment or the inability to shoot straight from an awkward position.

To revert to the subject of accidents which I recently mentioned, I repeat that very few shooting accidents are caused by mechanical failure of the gun, which is a tribute not only to the makers, but also to the care which the users generally take of their weapons.

Carelessness is by far the greatest cause of accidental shootings and lapses on the part of those who practise and preach safe gun handling are more common than one might expect. It is when familiarity with the rules breeds contempt by the usually careful shot that accidents are very liable to occur, and this applies to lone shooters in particular.

If you are one of a party, you think twice about taking a chance, for you know that your action is bound to be noticed by someone. But away out on your ownsome you tend to take more risks and that is where the danger lies, for although no one else may be in peril, there is always the chance that you yourself will land in trouble, and self-preservation is always a most laudable object.

Caught by a Wire

Pigeon shooting the other day, I discovered a perfect stalk to my position along an overgrown ditch. Running down its steep bank I saw my way barred by two strands of what, in the shade, looked like brambles. I charged on, thinking to burst through them, and was brought up short, to fall painfully into the damp depths of the ditch. The brambles were in fact two taut and rusty strands of wire. I'll admit it and do penance. I had not bothered to break, let alone remove the cartridges from my gun. The scar across my right shin reminds me that I was very lucky and that had the gun gone off, I might still be lying there.

After the event, even if it proves luckily harmless, is no time for reminders. Think more than once and walk warily whenever you have a gun in your hand.

I am indebted to a Scottish reader for an explanation of how to tell a young rook from a young crow, which, as I explained in a recent article has always posed a problem.

The easiest and surest way, he says, is to turn up and examine the breast feathers. Those of a crow are very light in colour—in fact almost white—but a rook's are very dark. My correspondent says that he has killed hundreds of crows and never known this test to fail. This identification method I shall now try, and sincerely hope that all my rooks turn out to be crows.

At last I have discovered, by the way, the translation of that Danish word *spergel*. It may be remembered that I mentioned it earlier as being a plant which is grown prolifically in Denmark as cattle fodder and that pigeon flock to feed on it. As far as I was concerned it remained an unknown quantity until Sig: Bjornsen of Chichester W.A. moved house and unearthed his dictionaries. As a result *spergel* turns out to be spurry.

Forthcoming Field Trials

Sept. 10 & 11: Yorkshire Gundog Club (Pointers and Setters). Secretary: Mrs. E. H. Bailey, Longclose, Bolton Hill, Bessacarr, Doncaster.

Sept. 10 & 11: North Western Counties Field Trial Association (Spaniels). Penrith, Cumberland. Open Cocker and Open A.V. Stakes. Secretary, A. Mason, 21 King Street, Carnforth, Lancs.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters and photographs are invited for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published. Correspondence should be addressed to The Editor, The Shooting Times & Country Magazine, 29 Old Bond Street, London, W.1. 'Phone: HYDe Park 2556/2557.

STRAYING PHEASANTS

Sir,—I read Mr. Moore's entertaining articles entitled as above (issues July 11 and 20) with great interest, and am pleased to find that he, with his years of practical experience of rearing pheasants, does not agree that the new method of rearing pheasants in movable pens is the cause of birds straying.

During the last rearing season, I came upon a number of keepers and owners who complained of their birds straying after they had been placed in the woods. The interesting thing for me was that only about half of these were using the pen system of rearing. The rest were using the open field, but, of course, using the modern method of feeding, i.e. a good commercial feed with a high protein content, and here is a point I think Mr. Moore has overlooked.

When keepers mixed their own food, grain grown on the estate played a large part in the make-up of the ration, and when the birds were put into covert the keeper continued with his food as their main feed. Consequently, the birds continued to get what they were used to and had no inclination to stray, looking for a more tasty diet.

Nowadays, the commercial feeds are attractive and appetising, and it is an essential part of the programme to continue feeding this food for some time after the birds have been put in the woods. In fact, I know some keepers who feed right through the season. If the birds are cut off from an attractive food and at the same time put in a strange place, it is fair to suppose they will "wander at will where their beak guides them," looking for the good food they have been used to. My experience has taught me that where a special pheasant growers pellet is fed daily until the poults are about 14 weeks old, the incidence of straying is reduced to a minimum.

On first sight, this may appear a costly way of retaining birds, but after the expense of rearing the birds, it is better to spend a little more and have the birds where you want them, than to economise at the last moment and have no birds at all.

The movable pen system has come in for a lot of criticism, as well as for a lot of praise. But I consider it is fair to say that but for the widespread use of this system the restocking of shoots all over the country would not be going ahead so rapidly.

JOHN F. PURBRICK.
Rugby, Warwicks.

CLAY PIGEON SHOOTING

Sir,—I was interested in the article "Introduction to Clays" on page 325 in the May 18 issue.

I recently took up trap shooting after a lay-off of nearly forty years and at the age of 64 my average is better than it was at 25. During the last month two noted shooters, both professional, have paid us a visit and were very helpful in their advice. Mr. D. Lee Braun from Remington was in a five-man team at the Grand American where they broke 998 out of 1,000 and also 499 out of 500.

Their advice on the stance of a shooter was very important, the body should be erect with the weight on the left leg (no bent knee) and inclined slightly forward. They stressed very strongly not to assume a grotesque position such as the shooter has in the picture on page 325, and stand in a relaxed position.

Mr. Jack White from Winchester was a guest at our club recently with a half dozen of the firm's latest guns; one was a 20-bore Magnum which handles a three inch case and 1 3/16oz. of lubaloy shot, truly a heavy 12-bore load.

I have read nearly every copy of your excellent journal since 1946 through the courtesy of Mr. Reynolds of Hunstanton with whom I exchange journals.

H. N. ANDERSON.
Santa Rosa, California.

A flock of "spadgers" flying up from their feeding activities. (See letter, "Sparrows on the Corn.")

SPARROWS ON THE CORN

Sir,—The considerable damage done to corn crops (growing and stooked) by the migrating town sparrow to the country is evident each year.

Large numbers are seen in the photograph I am sending you rising from a field of growing oats near Birmingham.

A friend tells me that the town sparrows would migrate to the country for a period during the summer, even if the corn crops were not available. The object of their migration is to cleanse their plumage.

A. KAY,
Birmingham.

LANGSTONE HARBOUR

Sir,—Readers are reminded that a meeting is being held at The Black Dog, West Street, Havant, on Saturday, August 25, at 6.30 *sharp*, in order to form a wildfowling association in this area.

D. S. HOWE,
3 Jubilee Villas, West Lane, Hayling Island.

YOUNG PIGEON

Sir,—In the August 10 issue "Auceps" mentioned the chief breeding season of woodpigeon and that so far this year he had not shot a young bird.

Over the last three years I have shot pigeon fairly regularly in this area and during the previous two years in North Lincolnshire. I had noticed that it was not until the end of August or September that the first young birds fell to my gun.

This year I shot my first young pigeon on July 14 and last weekend (August 4) parties of about four to eight obvious youngsters came into the decoys in laid corn. Those shot were farther advanced than I have seen in previous years in September. They were plump, good sized birds, but apart from other distinctions their youth was obvious from their succulent tenderness when cooked.

GAMBARDIER.
West Sussex.

THE CROWN AND THE FORESHORE

Sir,—I wonder if, to settle a heated argument between my friend, a landowner, and myself, a member of W.A.G.B.I., you could answer the following question.

Has any person ever been successfully prosecuted for shooting on Crown land up to high water mark of ordinary spring tides?

If so, other than on any declared refuge or sanctuary, can you persuade your legal expert to quote the case?

LINDUM,
Cleethorpes, Lincs.

[The word "prosecute" is generally associated with criminal proceedings. As trespass, other than that constituting an offence under the Game Act 1831 or the Night Poaching Act 1828, is not a criminal offence, neither the Crown nor a private owner of foreshore could prosecute anyone for shooting from the foreshore. In any case wildfowl are not within the scope of either Game Act. However, civil proceedings for damages and/or seeking an injunction to restrain a person from trespassing are always open both to the Crown or any subject.

In England the public have no right at law to shoot on the foreshore, though in Scotland there is some authority for saying that the law recognises such a right (see Hope v. Bennewith, 1904 41 SLR 839). The law as it affects the foreshore shooter was clearly explained in an article "Sea-walls and Saltings" in *The Shooting Times* of December 9, 1955.

Whilst it would appear that there is no recorded case wherein the Crown has taken any steps to interfere with the public shooting on the foreshore (other than in times of National Emergency), it must be realised that if so minded it could always do so. On the other hand a private individual was forced, albeit reluctantly, to enforce his rights. Thus in Fitzhardinge v. Purcell 1908, 99 LT 154 the court held that the owner of foreshore, whether Crown or subject, had the right to stop the public from shooting.

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The attitude of the Crown in these matters was well expressed by Mr. Justice Parker in that case.

In the course of his very learned judgment he said—"What was said by Holroyd J., in Blundell v. Caterall (1821) with regard to the alleged right of bathing on the foreshore may, I think, be said with equal truth of the alleged right to kill wildfowl in the channel of navigable rivers—'Where the soil remains the King's, and where no mischief or injury is likely to arise from the enjoyment or exercise of such public right, it is not to be supposed that an unnecessary and injurious restraint upon the subjects would, in that respect, be enforced by the King, the parens patriae'—and I think what is thus said of the King may with equal truth be said of those subjects of the King to whom beds of navigable rivers have been granted. At any rate I am satisfied in the present case that the defendant's sport would never have been interfered with had he not persistently asserted a right to shoot wildfowl, and that, too, in the immediate neighbourhood of the plaintiff's decoys."

In view of the great increase in gunners and the frequency of gun accidents in recent years, the words "where no mischief or injury is likely to arise" should ever be kept well in mind. The wildfowler, be he punt gunner or shore shooter, in enjoying his sport on the Crown's foreshore, must see that he neither inconveniences nor endangers others, including owners of adjoining lands, else the Crown may one day be forced to assert its rights.—Ed.]

START OF A SEASON

Sir,—To celebrate the successful start of the Association and to open our first season, the Chichester Harbour W.A. invite all members (with a friend) to a get-together at the Bull's Head Inn, Fishbourne, Chichester, on August 31 at 7.0 p.m. (ladies welcome).

The committee will be there in full force to welcome members from all parts of the country; to give them any information they may require on local wildfowling. Maps will be marked and explained to all members. Please come along and get to know one another, and help to get the season off to a good start, for most of us will be starting round and about the harbour on the following day.

There will be a "running buffet" and bar—high tide at the bar 10.30 p.m.

Please note my new address: 59 Gloucester Avenue, Regents Park, London, N.W.1.

SIGURD BJORNSEN.

(Hon. Secretary, The Chichester Harbour Wildfowlers' Association.)

SURVIVORS OF THE STORM

Sir,—We think the following facts will prove to be of interest to your readers.

On July 28 last on this game farm six broody bantams were taken off from six nests, containing 15 late partridge eggs each, and tethered. The nest box lids were left open to the sky. By an oversight the bantams were left tethered off until the following day. Meanwhile over an inch of cold rain fell. Indeed it was because of the heavy rain that it was deemed advisable to postpone the visit to the sitting boxes the following day! So the bantams had been off the eggs for 27 hours before the mistake was discovered. The bantams were so sodden and their nests so wet that it was several hours more before they actually settled down on their eggs. One bantam was not so optimistic as we were and refused to settle down at all. She scratched up her nest.

On the following day one egg was examined by making a hole about the size of a pencil in the air space. The embryo was found to be alive. The hole was sealed with cellulose tape.

On August 4 and 5 two bantams hatched eleven strong chicks each. Among the eggs to hatch was the one that had been punctured for inspection.

On August 11 and 12 the remaining three nests hatched a further 39 chicks. And again there was one that had been punctured for inspection.

To sum up: out of the 90 eggs, 15 were spoilt by the bantam scratching up. Fourteen, including some infertile eggs, failed to hatch. There were 61 live chicks.

P. R. SYMONDS,
Cotswold Game Farm, Stroud.

WOODCOCK

Sir,—In your remarks under a letter about woodcock carrying their young you give the clue to the whole question: "intentionally or accidentally?" I believe that woodcock carry their young accidentally when suddenly startled. If flushed while brooding chicks, most birds have had some warning of the approach of a human and have disentangled themselves from the chicks.

If the bird has failed to see or hear the approaching person until a foot is practically on it, it will spring suddenly into the air and may carry off a chick or two between its thighs.

A good many years ago my father witnessed such an incident. He startled a woodcock at his feet. The bird dropped a "ball" after about ten yards and a little further on, crossing a river, a second "ball." The second "ball" promptly swam ashore and proved to be a woodcock chick.

A similar thing happened later with a curlew. My father emerged from a wood on to open moor startling a curlew which dropped a small "ball" as it flew away. The spot was marked, and a curlew chick about two days' old was found.

Razorbills and guillemots seldom knock down their eggs or chicks in the normal course of events, but a thunder clap will produce a shower of eggs into the sea as the frightened birds leave the ledges.

A. F. MACBEAN,
Edzell, Angus.

MYXOMATOSIS SIDE LIGHT

Sir,—As many of the readers of *The Shooting Times* have pointed out, the virtual elimination of rabbits in Britain by myxomatosis has had many involved and unforseen effects. As an illustration: an acquaintance of mine here, in Canada, was intending to return to his former home in England to see his sister and other relatives and revisit the scenes of his earlier days. However when he learned of the virtual absence of rabbits, he gave up his intended visit, since he is a sportsman and had looked forward to rabbit shooting as one of the major incentives to the proposed trip back to England.

HENRY N. JONES,
Skootamatta Lake, Cloyne, Ontario.

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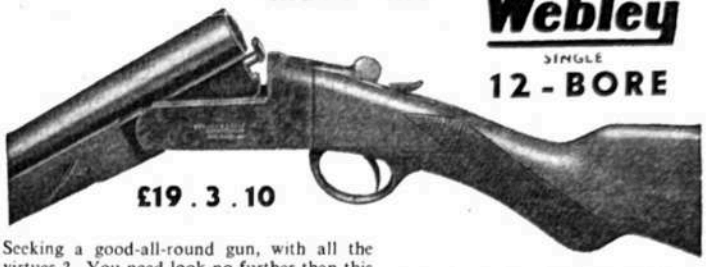

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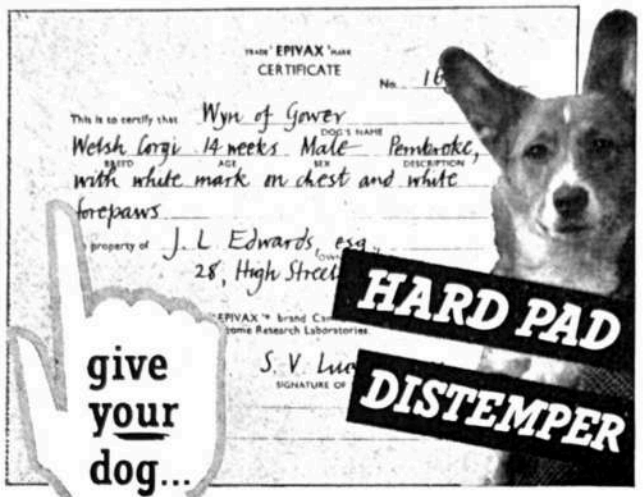

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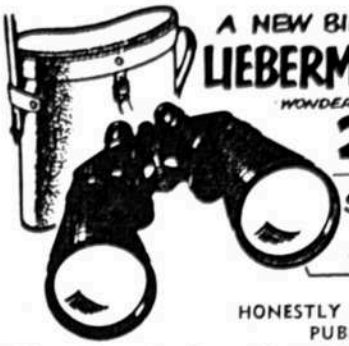

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Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

WATER training always occupies a good proportion of my time in August, especially upon the warmer days. This year I have been particularly unlucky as regards weather for this work, as up to the present there have been few really hot days, suitable for encouraging youngsters to take to water for the first time. It would happen too that this year I have several dogs in training for wildfowlers who, naturally, are most anxious that their dogs shall be experienced and bold in water. The local river has not been very helpful to me, for the water level is so low that it is difficult to get dogs down the steep banks into it, and on the few hot days we have had, the towpaths have been crowded with picknickers and holidaymakers.

However, I am fortunate in being only three miles from the sea, and also in the fact that on this coast the tide goes out a very long way. In any case, the beaches have a very gentle slope, which not only makes for safe bathing for children, but suitable introduction to water for dogs. Two of my pupils—a springer bitch and a labrador bitch—have been most reluctant to enter water, and most of my usual tricks, such as throwing in something edible, sending another dog out and so on, failed lamentably on them. I therefore decided to gird up my loins suitably and go "mud splashing" on the coast at low tide, early in the morning and late in the evening when few people are about. It has proved most successful, and also from my point of view most enjoyable, and I commend the idea to anyone with a dog which is indifferent to water.

Mudlark Training

My practice has been to take the two youngsters along with an experienced water dog (in order to be sure of not losing any dummies), and to walk out on the mud and get the dogs playing about. When the tideline is reached I throw out the dummy a little way (using the canvas cork-stuffed dummy mentioned in previous articles), and send out the old dog for it. The youngsters splash into the low water and show interest, and before very long they start retrieving the dummy from the shallow water. I then walk out and encourage them to follow me, and when the water is sufficiently deep to necessitate the pupils swimming or staying behind, I encourage them in every way, and wade along parallel with the shore for fifty yards or so before returning to shallower water. This prevents the pupils becoming over-tired or strained by too much swimming in the first instance, and reduces the chances of boredom or fear. I then give one or two retrieves on the mud and let them have a play around, and enter the water once again.

From this stage I find progress is rapid. The dogs have gained confidence in their ability to swim through having me close at their side and giving them encouragement, and now they will swim out a few feet after the dummy. On the second visit to the sea the labrador referred to was intensely interested in some seagulls swimming about a short distance out to sea, and she undertook an exploratory swim in their direction. When they rose into the air she turned and started to swim back and I threw the dummy for her, which she retrieved well. From that point on she has never looked back, and will now enter water on command without there being anything in sight for her to retrieve. However, she will not yet take a plunge off a steep bank, but this will come. The spaniel, too, has completely overcome her fear of water, and will swim out quite a long way to retrieve the dummy, braving small waves and even rearing out of the water in order to get a better view.

Salt water is probably the best for teaching dogs or humans to swim, because it is more buoyant and therefore much easier to swim in. I often wonder if we do not ignore the beneficial effects upon dogs of salt water, for I am certain that it is good for them in every way. I have frequently noticed what good coats sea water loving dogs have, and people of experience tell me that such dogs seldom suffer from skin complaints. I do not know if there is anything in this, but there may very well be. I certainly have never had a dog take any harm through swimming in the sea.

Retrieving from Ooze

When training a puppy for duck shooting or wildfowling generally, retrieving from muddy places and in reeds and rushes should not be neglected. Most dogs quickly come to love working the reeds, and floundering about in the stinking ooze which is to be found on most ponds and marshes. It always surprises me how they manage to find comparatively scentless dummies under such conditions, but find them they do. Where moorhen abound, dogs go simply crazy over the scent and they will hunt the birds rather than search for the dummy or dead bird which may be the object of their search. Moorhen are a nuisance at times, but for encouraging dogs in rushes and mud they cannot be bettered!

The All-aged Stake winner at the I.G.L. trials at Leadhills, Mrs. E. Nagle's and Miss M. Clark's Irish setter F.T.Ch. Sulhampsted Bounce D'Or with his handler Mr. G. H. Abbott.

FIELD TRIALS

The International Gundog League held pointer and setter trials at Leadhills, Lanarkshire, on July 31 and August 1, when the judges were Capt. W. Parlour and Dr. T. Boyd, from Northern Ireland.

Awards. Puppy and Non-Winners' Stake. 1, Col. A. S. Balding's E. setter Flashaway Eve; 2, Mr. J. Arthur Rank's pointer Scotney Cavalier (A. K. Manners); 3, Mr. J. Alun Roberts' pointer Segontium Tweed. Reserve, Mrs. Nagle's and Miss Clark's Irish setter Sulhampstead Nina d'Or (W. Abbot).

Major Michael Leslie Melville and Dr. J. B. Maurice at the I.G.L. pointer and setter field trial at Leadhills.

All-Aged Stake. 1, Mrs. Nagle's and Miss Clark's Irish setter F.T.Ch. Sulhampstead Bounce d'Or (W. Abbott); 2, Mr. A. Robert's pointer Segontium Tweed; 3, Col. Balding's setter Flashaway Eve. Reserve, Mrs. Nagle's and Miss Clark's F.T.Ch. Sulhampstead Basil d'Or (W. Abbott). Three certificates of merit were awarded.

* * *

The Yorkshire Gundog Club held pointer and setter trials at the Nookton and Newbiggin Moors, Blanchland, on July 27 and 28, when the judges were Mrs. E. J. Buist and Dr. J. B. Maurice.

Awards. Open Stake. 1, Mr. W. Humphrey's E. setter Consest Wind 'em; 2, Mr. J. A. Rank's pointer Scotney Gary (A. K. Manners); 3 Capt. W. Parlour's E. setter Waygood Fiona (Miss Knight). Reserve, Capt. Parlour's E. setter Sharnberry Belle (T. Sparke). Two certificates were awarded.

Gordon Setter Open Stake. 1, The Misses Huntingdon's Riggside Rainbow (Miss M. Huntingdon); 2, Mr. H. Ashman's Jarl of Westerdale.

Novice Stake. 1, Col. Balding's Flashaway Eve; 2, Mr. Arthur Rank's Scotney Cavalier (A. K. Manners); 3, Capt. Parlour's Waygood Fiona (Miss Knight). Reserve, Mrs. Nagle's and Miss Clark's Sulhampstead Nina d'Or (W. Abbott).

* * *

The South of Ireland Gundog Club ran pointer and setter trials on the moors at Ballyfin, Leix, on July 20 and 21, the judges being Mr. J. B. Dowley and Mr. J. R. Reynolds.

Awards. Open Stake. 1, Mr. P. F. Goodwin's Irish setter bitch Fermanagh St. Rua; 2, Rev. Fr. T. Murphy's setter Kilshelan Gilbert; 3, Mr. F. Colhoun's pointer Lenwade Warbler. Reserve, Mr. D. McMenamin's Irish setter Roscomrobe Red Grouse (J. Cranston). Seven certificates awarded.

Novice Stake. 1, Mr. Colhoun's Lenwade Warbler; 2, Capt. J. Till's German pointer Greta (J. Cranston); 3, Mr. D. McMenamin's Irish setter Derrycarne Rye (J. Cranston).

The Irish Red Setter Club's meeting was held at Ballybofey, Co. Donegal, on July 23 and 24, judges being Mr. B. J. McDermot and the Rev. Fr. P. Mulligan.

Awards. Derby Stake for Pointers and Setters. 1, Mr. H. Taylor's Gordon Diane of Morar; 2, Mr. P. Murphy's Irish setter Ros Rua; 3 Dr. Hanley's Irish setter Ruful Fox.

All-aged stake for Irish setters. Mr. P. Goodwin's Fermanagh St. Rua; 2, Mr. G. Spence's Red Bloom; 3, Mr. D. McMenamin's Roscombe Red Grouse (J. Cranston).

International All-aged stake for pointers and setters. 1, Mr. J. Nash's Irish setter New Square Red Lassie; 2, Dr. T. Boyd's pointer Segontium Firefly; 3, Mr. A. L. Spiers' Irish setter Sherry of Curracloe (Dr. T. Boyd). Reserve, Mr. D. McMenamin's Roscombe Red Grouse (J. Cranston).

Maiden Stake. 1, Mr. P. Murphy's pointer Sceolan; 2, Mr. D. McMenamin's Irish setter Derrycane Rye (J. Cranston); 3, Mr. L. C. Magee's Irish setter Chass of Boho.

* * *

The Ulster Irish Red Setter Club's trials were held on the moors, outside Omagh, Co. Tyrone, when the judges were Dr. B. Deeny and Mr. T. Green.

Awards. Derby Stake. 1, Mr. W. Kehoe's Irish setter Jay of Killone (Capt. Courtney); 2, Mr. T. McMenamin's pointer Victurus; 3, Dr. D. Hanley's Irish setter Royal Fox.

All-aged stake for Irish Setters. 1, Mr. P. Goodwin's Fermagh St. Rua; 2, Mr. D. McMenamin's F.T.Ch. Roscombe Red Grouse (J. Cranston); 3, Mr. T. Patterson's Ballycooel.

Grand All-aged Stake. 1, Mr. Goodwin's Irish setter Fermanagh St. Rua; 2, Mr. McMenamin's Roscombe Red Grouse (J. Cranston); 3, Mr. J. Nash's pointer Queen of Glengar. Reserve, Mr. M. Normoyle's Irish setter Flush Royal. Two certificates were awarded.

* * *

The Northern Ireland Pointer Club's trials were held on the moors outside Ballymena on

Capt. W. Parlour and Dr. T. Boyd, the judges at the I.G.L's trials at Leadhills.

August 2 and 3, when the judges were Mr. D. MacKenzie and Mr. D. McMenamin. On the first day the weather was very bad—wet nearly all the time, but birds showed up fairly well considering the conditions. The ground was full of hares and the handlers were hard put to in keeping the puppies in check. On the second day the weather was much better, but birds were scarce and scent was none too good. However, by the time the novice stake was run conditions improved a good deal.

Awards. Derby Stake for pointers and setters. 1, Mr. A. Steedes' pointer Mona of Ora (W. Gardner); 2, Mr. P. Wayre's pointer Lenwade Whisper (F. Courtney); 3, Mr. W. Gardiner's pointer Wing Commander. Reserve, Mr. G. Bartholomew's pointer Clovenden Chieftan (J. Cranston). One certificate.

All-aged stake for pointers. 1, Mr. J. Nash's Queen of Glengar; 2, Mr. F. Colhoun's Lenwade Warbler; 3, Mr. A. Colhoun's Int. F.T.Ch. Bessie Bell. Reserve, Mr. B. Filor's Crockalough Folly. Three certificates were awarded.

Open All-aged Stake for pointers and setters. 1, Mr. J. Nash's Irish setter New Square Lassie; 2, Dr. T. Boyd's pointer Segontium Firefly; 3, Mr. J. Dub's pointer Bellrock Airstream (F. Courtney). Reserve, Rev. Fr. J. Bannon's English setter Sieglinde. Eleven certificates of merit were awarded.

* * *

The Ulster Gundog League's trials were held on August 4 at Carnalbanagh, Co. Antrim, when the judges were Messrs. D. McKenzie and V. M. McKeag.

Awards. Championship Stake. 1, Mr. F. Colhoun's pointer Int. F.T.Ch. Bessie Bell; 2, Mr. D. McMenamin's Irish setter F.T.Ch. Roscombe Red Grouse (J. Cranston); 3, Rev. Fr. J. Bannon's setter Flite. Reserve, Mr. Colhoun's pointer Lenwade Warbler.

Novice Stake. 1, Mr. E. Tosh's German pointer Speccles of Holybrook; 2, Capt. J. Till's German pointer Greta (J. Cranston); 3, Mr. P. Wayre's pointer Lenwade Whisper (F. Courtney).

Wildfowling Clubs

The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland: Hon. Secretary, Brig. G. D. Holmes, Burnham Thorpe, Nr. King's Lynn, Norfolk.

SECRETARY'S NOTES

There will be a meeting of the Executive Committee on September 15, at 2 p.m., at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham. It will be a particularly important meeting because it may well be the last before the annual general meeting in March, 1957, and because it is the first under the new sub-committee organisation. It is, therefore, hoped that as many members of the Executive Committee, and as many representatives of Wildfowling Associations as possible will attend.

CLUB REPORTS

Two posters inscribed "WHY FEED VERMIN WITH DUCKS? SHOOT MORE VERMIN," and "LESS VERMIN, MORE DUCKS; SHOOT MORE VERMIN," decorated the room when 42 members of the Kent Wildfowlers' Association met recently at the Fox and Goose, Bapchild, to hear Mr. Gordon Pattinson talk on the "Control of Vermin." Mr. Pattinson, one of our committee members, is the county pests officer and he gave a most comprehensive talk, illustrated with his own lantern slides and many diagrams.

The policy for rats is extermination. We were shown a series of surprising slides taken recently in Kent to illustrate some of the damage these animals do and methods for rat-proofing farm buildings. The blood anti-coagulent Warfarin, was recommended as the most effective poison and gassing as the second line of attack. The grey squirrel is best controlled by shooting, but cage and tunnel traps can also be effective; 55,000 squirrels' tails have been handed in from Kent since the tail bounty started in 1953.

The fox should be no trouble on a well-keepered estate, but Kent suffered particularly on the fringes of the well-populated areas where foxes found shelter in park and common land. Drives and gassing have proved the most effective control. Crow traps were considered in detail and slides of all types were shown, including a home-made ladder-trap near Dartford, which was situated under trees and near a water trough and which has caught several thousand crows. A similar trap near Tunbridge Wells covered with finer mesh netting caught 4,000 starlings in three days in the cold spell of the past winter.

Turning to woodpigeon, Mr. Pattinson said that no trap was of use, that narcotics were not proving their worth, but that there were repellent sprays which appeared to keep pigeon away from crops for at least short periods. Shooting was the only really effective method of control, particularly over decoys. Once again, the colour slides showed decoys of all different types in use. The speaker recommended removing artificial decoys when enough are killed, but his wooden decoys on fence posts looked most realistic. We also saw how well an uncovered face can be seen peering from a hide.

In the discussion following this excellent talk, members reported the scarcity of the woodpigeon in many parts of Kent this summer. Mr. David Ashenden, from the chair, reported that his dog had found six dead ones near Canterbury, and Mr. Tom Gregory said that he felt sure that the cold winter had destroyed many pigeon, but that others were being killed by chemical sprays. The damage was being done by those farmers who were not content to use the chemicals as directed, but decided to give the crops a "real good doing" and used the sprays in greater strength than the directions indicated.

* * *

Miss Rutherford gave an unusual and most interesting lecture to members of The Southport and District W.A. and visitors with a demonstration of taxidermy. Miss Rutherford, who is assistant to Mr. Wagstaffe, of the Liverpool Museum, had a fascinated audience whilst preparing the skin of a pigeon. Mr. Wagstaff who described what was being done step by step said that Miss Rutherford could prepare six skins in one day at the Museum. On completion, not a single feather could be found out of place which speaks highly for her skill.

In his vote of thanks Mr. J. Brough said that Miss Rutherford was a "sort of oddity" as it was not often that females could be found doing such unusual work in a Museum. It went on to say that their work on collection as we see it was only a fraction of the ground they cover, classification, etc., being their major task. He said that Mr. Wagstaffe was completely enveloped in this his life's work and that if there twenty-five hours in every day and eight day in every week there would still not be sufficient time for him. Thus, we feel more grateful than ever that these people should forfeit their precious time to come along and talk to us.

* * *

The Annual General Meeting of the Westmorland W.A. took place in the Heversham Hotel, Heversham, on Thursday, August 9. Mr. J. Powell presided over a gathering of 29 members and much business was transacted.

Mr. J. Powell was re-elected president, J. D. Renwick chairman, K. Adamson hon. treasurer, and F. Rowlandson hon. secretary. Messrs. D. Burrow, R. Hackney, R. D. Humber, J. Ruxton, D. Shepherd, and J. Stott were elected on to the committee.

A new rule was passed regarding subscriptions. Now subscriptions will fall due in August. Any member not paid up by September 1 will be ruled to have left the club but if he is prepared to pay a further 50 per cent of his subscription by October 1 he will be reinstated. As we are limited to 50 guns on our shoots, we must know who wishes to shoot by October 1 because we have a waiting list.

A new duck rearing programme was formulated as follows: Duck will be trapped soon in the close season and will be kept for egg production. Clutches of eggs will be farmed out to members for hatching and rearing. Birds will then be collected and released. Any member wishing to help in this rearing scheme is invited to contact the hon. secretary.

Entertainments for the future include a dinner and Social at the Heversham Hotel on September 13. A lecture by Dr. Harrison will be held in Kendal in October.

Quarterly meetings will be held at the Heversham Hotel. Dates to be announced. These meetings will be open to anyone who cares to attend, and a cordial invitation is extended to all members of W.A.G.B.I. and affiliated clubs.

(Several Reports are unavoidably held over till next week).

Clay Pigeon Shooting

Fixture List

Aug. 24: Childrey C.P.S. Club. Members' Shoot, 6 p.m.

Aug. 25: Waltham Abbey G.C., Essex. Members' Final Shoot, 2 p.m.

Aug. 25: Lancashire Sporting Championship, Bowland & District G.C., Sawley, Clitheroe.

Aug. 25: Worcestershire Sporting Championship. Birmingham G.C., Brockhill Lane, Redditch.

Aug. 25: Wetherby & District G.C., Yorks. Members' Shoot.

Aug. 25: Southern Counties Skeet Championships, Blandford & District G.C., Hedge End, Blandford, Dorset, 10.30 a.m.

Aug. 26: Olympic Trial Shoot, Bisley G.C., Surrey. 10.30 a.m.

Aug. 26: Surrey and Hampshire Skeet Championship. Grange G.C., Tongham, Nr. Farnham, Surrey.

Aug. 26: Coventry and District D. & G.C. Club Shoot. 7 p.m.
Aug. 26: Royal Oak C.P. Club, Cowfold, Sussex. Members' Shoot, 10.30 a.m.
Aug. 26: Beverley & District G.C. 2 p.m. Open shoot.
Aug. 28: Carlisle & District G.C. Open Shoot. £15 match, over 25 birds. Article Event 11 a.m.
Aug. 28: Billingsley and Chorley G.C. Members Shoot. 6 p.m.

* * *

Reports and Results

The 15th Open Skeet Championship of Great Britain was held for the second time on the ground of the Bedford and District Gun Club at Elstow, on Saturday, July 28. There was an excellent entry of 115 guns, which included competitors from Australia, Scotland and Wales, as well as the United States and England, both countries entering teams for the International Skeet Match.

A high standard of shooting was maintained over the five stages of the Championship, and 24 "possibles" were made. The weather conditions varied from a heavy thunderstorm in the morning to cloudy with bright intervals in the afternoon and evening.

The winner of the Open Championship was Mr. E. L. Nickols, of Pinchbeck, Lincs., who scored a total of 97 out of 100, which included a "60 straight" followed by an 18 and a 19. Mr. J. Wheater was the runner-up, with 96, after shooting-off with Messrs. E. T. Peacock and D. H. Finer.

Four layouts, side-by-side, were used for the Meeting, and the Field Captain, Mr. E. T. Peacock, Mr. R. D. Purcell, and the other officials of the Bedford and District Gun Club are to be heartily congratulated upon the success of the shoot. Competitors were divided into three Classes, A, B, and C, and special events were held for Ladies and Colts.

The Ladies' Skeet Championship was held for the first time, the Challenge Cup being kindly presented by Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Beal, of Exeter. The winner was Mrs. J. R. Kidwill (49/60).

Two tie shoots were necessary to decide the winner of the Colts' event, and the first prize was awarded to Lindsay Ervin (U.S.A.), and second to John Hall (Malton, Yorks.), both having scored 50 out of 60.

British Open Skeet Championship (100 birds)—1, E. L. Nickols, 97; 2, J. Wheater, 96.

Class "A"—(100 birds). 1, E. T. Peacock, 96; 2, M. D. Tindol (U.S.A.), 95; 3, M. L. Freeman, 94; 4, G. A. Morin (U.S.A.), 93; 5, A. M. Toms, 93; 6, P. Stanbury, 92.

Class "B"—(100 birds). 1, D. H. Finer, 96; 2, G. Jones, 92; 3, A. J. Steele, 89; 4, A. Pratt, 89; 5, W. Heald, 88; 6, A. E. Hinz (U.S.A.), 88.

Class "C"—(60 birds). 1, G. A. Purser, 45; 2, D. Douglas, 43; 3, R. Fidler, 42.

Ladies—(60 birds). 1, Mrs. J. R. Kidwill, 49; 2, Mrs. B. C. Baxter, 33; 3, Mrs. H. B. Smith, 25.

Colts—(60 birds). 1, L. Ervin (U.S.A.), 50; 2, J. Hall, 50; 3, N. Foster, 48; 4, P. Wilkinson, 45; 5, A. Jones, 39; 6, H. Wiseman, 34.

International Skeet Match. 1, England "A", 467/500; 2, U.S.A., 452; 3, England "B", 427; 4, All Comers, 416; 5, England "C", 411.

Inter-Club Event. Leicester & District G. C., 458/500.

All Counties Skeet Championship. J. Wheater (Yorkshire and North of England), 96.

Coronation Challenge Cup. J. Wheater, 943/1,000.

CLAY PIGEON SHOOTS
TO BE HELD DURING
SEPTEMBER • 1956
• A further list of fixtures will be published in next week's issue •

OPEN SHOOT
OPEN 100 BIRDS "D.L." and LEICESTERSHIRE DOUBLE RISE CHAMPIONSHIP
on Saturday, September 15th, 1956
(100 BIRDS — 2 AUTO TRAPS)
COMMENCING 1 p.m. PROMPT — PRACTICE 12 to 1 p.m.

MINIMUM "D.L." PRIZE LIST

High Gun £15	Runner-up £10		
Class "A"	£5	£4	£3
Class "B"	£5	£4	£3
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OPEN SKEET CHAMPIONSHIP
AT
WALTHAM ABBEY GUN CLUB - HONEY LANE
(near Isolation Hospital)
ON
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 1st, 1956
commencing 1 p.m. (entries accepted up to 3 p.m.)
OPEN and CLASS A, B and C • INTER-CLUB TEAM 2-MEN TEAM
PRIZES VALUE £30 or more - ENTRIES £2.10.0 for 80 Birds
A SPORTING SHOOT WILL BE STAGED
Cartridges available on ground but competitors may use their own provided the maximum load is 1⅛oz., the largest shot size No. 6
LICENSED BAR, TEAS & SNACKS AVAILABLE
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OPEN EVENT
25 BIRDS DOWN-THE-LINE • UNLIMITED ENTRY
FIRST PRIZE £10, with additional prizes
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THE SHOOTING GROUND, CASTLE NEROCHE FARM
BUCKLAND ST. MARY, NEAR TAUNTON
SATURDAY, 1st SEPTEMBER, 1956 - 12.30 p.m. sharp
• ALL WELCOME •

NORTH WALES GUN CLUB
SEPTEMBER 22nd, 1956
CONTINENTAL BALL TRAP SYSTEM SHOOT
100 BIRDS • 4 STAGES • 1 CLASS ONLY
PRIZES - 1st £15; 2nd £12; 3rd £10; 4th £6
Excess entry fees beyond 12 guns will be extended on the prize list pro rata. Entry fee £5, by post only, not later that September 19th, 1956, addressed to Hon. Sec., Mr. E. Lloyd, Arfryn, Rhosesmor, Mold, N. Wales. Tel. Halkyn 363.

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RHOSESMOR
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NORTH WALES OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP
OVER £50 CASH PRIZES
Also
The F. R. Readhead Perpetual Challenge Cup and Blazer Badge
(kindly presented by F. R. Readhead, Esq., Salisbury)
In addition there are the
Challenge Shield, Medal and Novice Tankard
FOR AREA COUNTY COMPETITION
(kindly presented by Imperial Chemical Industries Ltd.)
ON
SATURDAY, 1st SEPTEMBER, 1956
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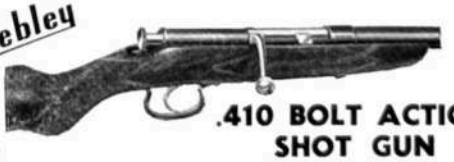

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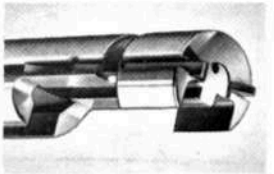

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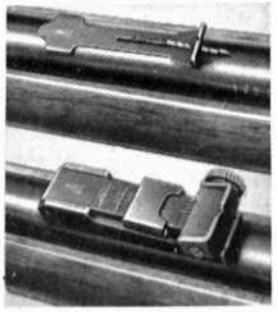

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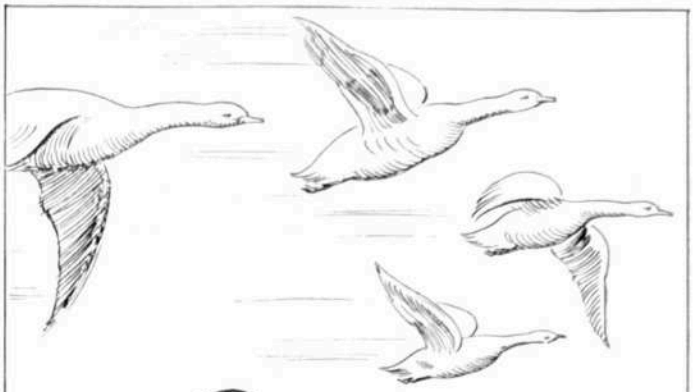

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